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QUESTIONNAIRE:



A View from the Charnel House

An Interview with William Bennett

Whitehouse: To everyone familiar with the work of this long-lived unit the name immediately conjures an entire series of increasingly disturbing images. A well-equipped torture chamber in some remote, subterranean locale. A slow, almost ritualistic procession of shadowy, silhouetted figures, some in hooded cloaks, some in skin-tight black leather garb. Glistening, stainless steel instruments of violence; trembling, naked, vulnerable young bodies. The quick and all-too-brief convulsive spasm of the joyless orgasm. The clammy concrete floor spattered crimson with somebody's blood. Another body to be disposed of.

So far so good. But however much we claim to learn about the formal aspects of Whitehouse's music, there still remain nagging questions to be confronted and answered, if possible. Just what kind of a world view, indeed what sort of a human personality would be responsible for producing this, "the most violent music in the world" (or so Whitehouse itself would have us believe)? It was in the hope of finding some possible answers to these questions that this writer conducted the following interview with one of the pioneer members of Whitehouse, William Bennett. The performer's replies came by airmail and were dated July 19 1982.

□□□□

(Bennett): In answer to your questions (which I find refreshingly interesting when you compare them with the usual) I have given purely a personal answer; basically because there is no real corporate "manifesto" of ideas with the organization, but nevertheless answers will be fairly representative.

1. What are your aims musically?

Musically the aim is to translate as much mental violence and power into music as is possible. If people were honest with themselves, they would know that we deliver the goods they really want.

2. What do you say to those who charge that Whitehouse produces 'immoral music'? Responding to the morality charge, I have always found that people who criticize on the grounds of "immorality," etcetera, are people responding to arguments that have no rhyme or reason, e.g.: "It is immoral to have sex with your twelve year-old daughter." I would read the above sentence as "There is no earthly reason why you shouldn't have sex with, etc." I have respect for individual people, but certainly not for a vague humanity.

3. What are your motivations in focusing on the blacker aspects of existence? Our motivation? The "darker" side of people is fundamentally the more interesting; it inflames the imagination more, and affects one's senses profoundly and vividly.

4. What are your feelings about the Third Reich?

This period in history, the Third Reich [in Germany], is truly fascinating, perhaps the most overt display of power ever witnessed. Many revolutions were inevitable whoever had led them, but uniquely the Third Reich was built by a single and most remarkable individual.

5. Do you feel that man is born good or evil?

Yes, man like all animals is born "good," that is, innocent, with no free will. Surely evil or corruption is a sign of a more advanced or civilized society. The man who chooses the path of evil has surely proved that he is the most civilized. People will always be good while they are ignorant, which is why Marxism requires the restriction of information. I tend to follow Nietzsche on this subject, in *The Genealogy of Morals and Beyond Good and Evil* [US publisher Viking Press, Walter Kaufmann, editor].

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WHITEHOUSE



6. How does the public generally react to your work?

We are treated with a mixture of petty, contemptuous remarks, with a pose of studied ignorance. On the other hand we have no complaints to make on this score, as this situation tends to suit us.

7. Do you feel your fans understand what you're doing, music-wise?

I would say most of our fans understand what we're doing because they get off on the violent image, but a few complain that they don't understand it—usually Throbbing Gristle freaks with nowhere left to go.

(At this point this writer inserted a list of pre-selected words to which Mr. Bennett was to respond, as in the classic word-association testing.) I've split your names up into two sections, positive reaction and negative reaction with occasional responses in brackets:

Positive Reactions:

Charles Manson

Adolf Hitler

Gilles de Reis (Medical Satanist and mass murderer... Sade must have been influenced by this great man)

Friedrich Nietzsche (The last great writer?)

The Marquis de Sade (Truly a genius. I have a personal claim to being a big authority on the Marquis)

Alfred Rosenberg (Nazi philosopher)

Leni Riefenstahl (Brilliant filmmaker)

Technology

Death (Orgasm, necro-sadism)

National Front/Skinheads (...are truly an awesome sight en masse in England. They emit such a flood of energy and vitality)

Aleister Crowley (An intriguing individual with enormous energy and charisma)

Coprophilia, Incest, Bondage, many perversions, Johann Sebastian Bach (!)

Negative Reactions

John Cage (Far too pretentious)

Pop music (...is a cop-out for junkies)

Sigmund Freud (This man spouted more shit than a sewer)

Christianity (Having said I disrespect Christianity and indeed all religions, Jesus was an extremely interesting man who has been remorselessly misinterpreted over the last two thousand years. Jesus' mistake was allowing to be led to believe by his own followers that he was the son of "God")

Capitalism

Punk Rock (With the odd exception)

Art

□□□□

This section concluded the interview. In a later exchange of letters, Bennett explained how he hoped that his own lyrics and music evoked in his audience that sense of *frisson* (a French term probably best translated as a delectable shiver combining revulsion with fascination) which he found "sadly lacking" in most contemporary art forms. Bennett described how it is just this lack of delectable shivers in "avant-garde" art today which had led him to his own obsessive fascination with hardcore pornography and the biographies of famous mass murderers—a fascination which has found its ultimate expression in the tortured and sexually "repugnant" lyrics of most of the songs in the Whitehouse repertoire.

"I find the way to give people the biggest jolts is to make them think they're in a real situation," Bennett said, "not one of fantasy, which is too safe and secure." The allusion is appropriate not only to Whitehouse's lyrics but also to the contents of the group's publication *Kata*, which regularly features police file photographs of the victims of sex murders, and various cut-up versions (*a la* Burroughs/Gysin) of case history material regarding all aspects of sexual and murderous psychopathology.

Although Whitehouse has always been firmly categorized as a "power electronics" band, their motivations as musicians owe probably as much to the ideas of the Marquis de Sade as they do to the pronouncements of any of the currently popular "avant garde" musical gurus. To Whitehouse the relationship between artists and audience is intensely sado-masochistic, with the performer dominating his listeners into a passively acquiescent acceptance of aural and psychic pain. During several of Whitehouse's early "live-action" performances, the band sensitized the audience for the final, deafening musical assault by first projecting filmssuch as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and various porno flicks.

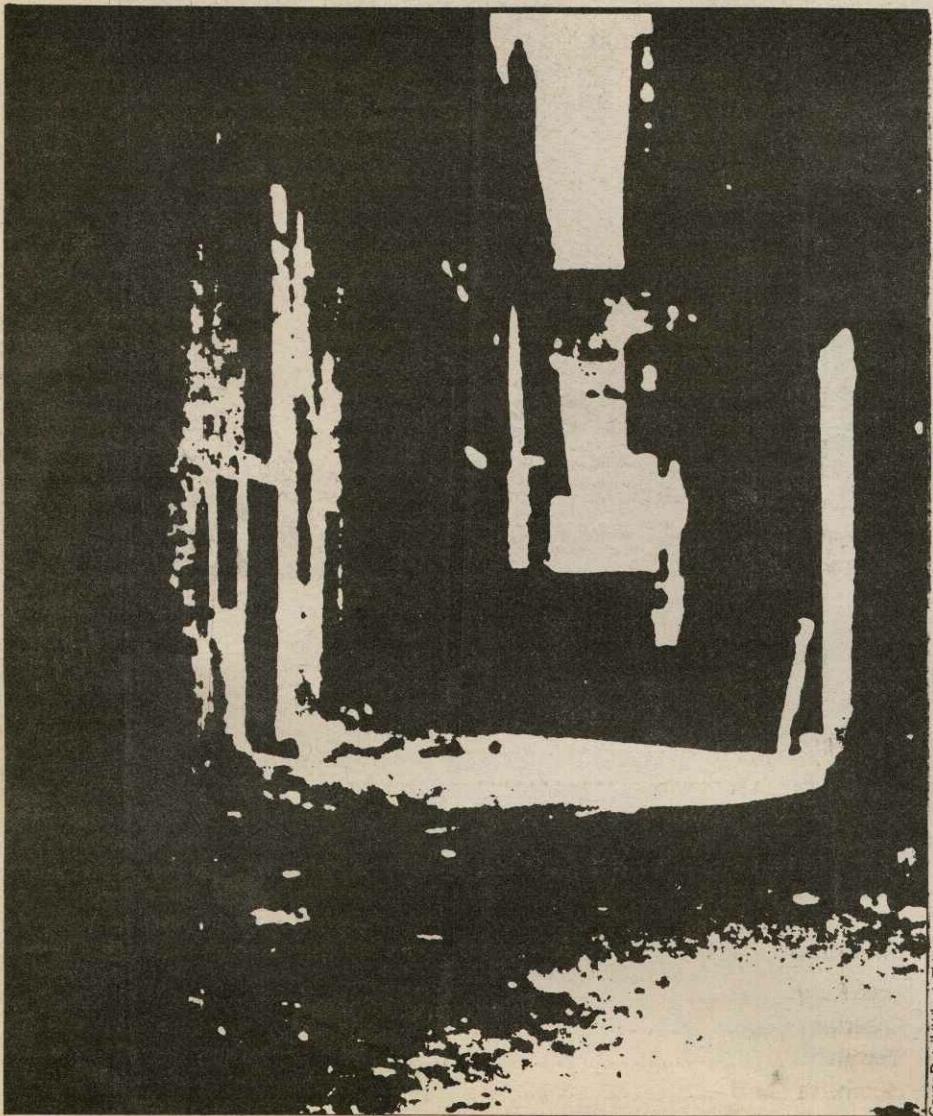
This equation of pain equalizing pleasure was later precisely articulated in a short manifesto entitled "War or Peace?" which was printed in *Kata* 09. "People need wholesome fear," the essay reads. "Where the violence is greater, the shock upon the nervous system will be sharper... The listeners of these [Come Organization] records will always enjoy the most intense reactions of all, because they are the most violently repulsive records ever conceived." The wording is, of course, Whitehouse's, but the curiously compelling "perverse" logic is purely de Sadean. The artist as practising sadist, with Whitehouse being the ultimate personification of this idea.

COME ORGANISATION CONTACT:

9-11 Kensington High Street
London
ENGLAND

—Questions/Commentary: Carl Alessi

VISCERA



hysterics. What we now require are painful reminders of our personal frailty and fallibility. Viscera's lyrics have now become interior monologues of self-destruction, complete with overtones of domination and sadistic relationships. In the track "This One" Hal McGee —through heavily distorted vocals, chants the cassette title like a steely-voiced warden running down the checklist of new inmates: "Who is this one? What does he say? What does he do?"

Viscera extracts everyday experience and turns it inward, developing an obsessed claustrophobia; building characters who run from small places by hiding in smaller places: "You're so well hidden..." This is Jaffe's obsequiously enticing claim in the piece "Field Glasses":

"...everything's so neat
the condition of catastrophe
take away what i see...
no informal negotiations
just blue steel blades
i deny all reconciliations
take away what i see

The power of this cassette is such that, unlike the early cassette, there is not one but many centerpieces. One of these is Side Two's "Red Hot." Here McGee demonstrates an affinity with the sense of color-as-allegory which Antonioni does in his *Red Desert*. In a landscape in which the surreal meets the sci-fi in dub, you might say, McGee paints an aimless soul in a typically interior monologue. Now, 'surreal' describes this landscape well. Here the houses alongside the lonely sidewalks glow red and blue. A blue glow is friendly, and reminds of his brother's calm blue eyes. Red glows are menacing, and cause horrid pain. Surrealism, we forget, is the process in which phenomena touch the subconscious mind directly and cause hallucinations; illusions; dreams. Viscera's sensibility is now keen enough that it need only touch exterior objects (a house, a pair of field glasses, a couple intertwined in sex) to pinch an interior nerve.

Chris Willging, in A/a's Pause & Eject column (hello), recently described *Who Is This One?* this way:

"...Music that one is engulfed by; deliberately, beautifully strange... I find Viscera's music very pristine; though it is not simple, it is very direct and seemingly unified in its intent... Viscera is one of the few bands that I can describe in visual terms without difficulty."

Viscera's effectiveness may be due in part to its credibility as ritual of exorcism — perhaps the difference between soulfulness and soullessness in all creative work is the degree to which responsibility is accepted for the cleansing of the human form, that is, to bring us through fire to the angelic condition prophesized by Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and the like. The glowing red house might just be an exteriorized demon, being prepared for violent extinction. "This is war to extermination" —William Burroughs, *Nova Express*. Jaffe and McGee now know how to conjure these demons without lyrics — they can do it with the human scream and the oscillator throb. As in ...Foreign Film the economy of *Who Is This One?* remains awesome; so much from so little. Another centerpiece of the cassette is Side One's "initiative," which may be Viscera's first experiment with tape manipulation, of which more have already come. Here Jaffe, her voice speeded, frantically babbles off another interior monologue—but the 'mindflow' is rendered psychotic as Viscera relentlessly taps the fast-forward button on the Fostex X-15 — the effect is that perhaps one word out of every ten is understandable. To the listener, the madwoman is being recreated right before us, shaking us. Rather than simply describing a theoretically fearful situation, therefore, Jaffe actualizes it in a physical dimension. Our fear is now real. Our need to escape is now undeniable. But escape can only come by ripping the headphones off of your ears and wrestling them to the ground — an act which would make you more irrational than Jaffe!

In this way however a hidden strength of Viscera is revealed: the ability to induce the psychological hammerlock. Here, in a mental labyrinth, in a dark passage which never ends (like the cover photo), identity is again reduced to 'I,' 'I,' 'I,' and again there is the color sense of the insane: importantly, and probably by chance, the Cue button is released — at one moment of the track — on the stressed word "GREEN."

Jaffe establishes a marching platoon of these empty souls, stripped of identity, in "Abortive Attempt," with its emotionless chant "And the next one walked in, and her arms to the side..." Electronics in *Who Is This One?* seem to underlie the spoken word, gathering power like a massing crowd, threatening to consume living flesh. This only adds to the listener's paranoia.

But no longer content with the mere threat of paranoia, Jaffe and McGee have in more recent efforts found a greater linkage with the artists P16 D4, Le Syndicat, and Pacific 231 in using pure sound waves alone as the engulfing fire. And with such apparent success that Viscera alone is insufficient to handle their respective prodigious outpourings. For this reason we have McGee's solo project Dog as Master and Jaffe's Master/Slave Relationship. In both names, notice the themes of dominance, sadism, and dissipation of human importance. The first Dog as Master cassette, a C-35 entitled *Coffee Spleen and the Barking Dog*, consists of two delightfully-named pieces: "slimy stew and pussy gruel" and "slash gash hard and cruel." The titles seem arbitrary, and only in it for the rhyme. Poorly recorded piano, with a melody echoing twentieth-century experiments in atonality, drives the work, which also boasts typically harsh percussive sounds wrecked through a delay box, deformed electronics, and diseased vocal treatments. With a cassette label that could be called "The Savior Obscured by Xerography," the tape seems to sincerely cry for an answer to the burning questions "Where would music today be without digital delays?" and "What the hell is a Coffee Spleen?" McGee, answerless as usual, adopts the pose of the depraved lecturer in a caffeine hangover (a familiar Nurse With Wound scenario!), achieving a recessive sonic claustrophobia with a desperately uncluttered mix. How far above McGee's early work this is, as it approaches the true characteristics of microtonality, of atonal pitch organization! Open-ended neurotics rules the darkening day.

One of the worst songs ever penned in the English language — worse even than "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" or "That's What God Looks Like to Me" — goes "If God didn't make little green apples, it doesn't rain in Indianapolis in the springtime." Whether this is true or not, Indianapolis has burdens enough without the added one of a song like that. However the beleaguered burg has been partially redeemed by the activities of Hal McGee and Debra Jaffe. Through Cause & Effect Distribution they have become an international agency for the furthering of adventurous sounds, and — importantly — they've worked to vanquish the bias against American music and values which permeates 'independent' music today.

Their own music, as Viscera and more recently as Dog as Master and Master/Slave Relationship, has developed over the past few years. Jaffe and McGee are now better able to speak for their own values. One can see this development clearly when recent work is compared to earlier material, such as 1983's *In a Foreign Film*. Here one can receive a rough idea of thematic scheme by scanning track titles: "Mysterious Pleasures," "Drifting into Sync," "Ruins," "With Eyes Open." Another title, "Cause and Effect," has of course now come to represent the whole of their bus'ness activities. Exercising a tautly nervous sense of the vividly surreal, the music of this cassette is "grey" and sparse, with deceptively simple Casio melodies that twist and bend around occasional woodwinds and an almost pointillistic approach to treated rhythm. The effect is like sonic representations of paintings by Miro, or more precisely of those by the misbegotten Surrealist Yves Tanguy (a pallid face stretched obliquely over a miscolored canvas). One woodwind piece bears noticeable affinities to "Anchors," by Cherry Red's strongly impressionistic band Five or Six. The centerpiece of this early Viscera effort is the Side Two opener "She Wants to Forget." Having already been introduced to the pained, mostly flat, and joyless voice of McGee and to the cold, oracle-like, and twistedly sensual voice of Jaffe over Side One, we are ready for their psycho-pathological teamuphere — the teamup of hideously detached souls.

"Give her your hand — she wants to forget
Give her an eye to see — she wants to forget
...how her faith let her down..."

"I will... let the dogs run free..." Jaffe here represents a nihilistic bid for chaos, mixed into the background, the background of sorrow and bitter memory. She is the Id kept barely in check (or "the woman with the broken mind," as she describes it in the piece "Abandon"). But McGee is no more inviting as the cold, emotionless voice of 'reason.' Characters across this cassette are lost and dead, like Lucifer in "Black on Black on Woman," who "stepped out of his body." Here human bodies are lifeless edifices, and human interaction is a city of empty buildings, of buses going nowhere.

Here humor comes down to a bleak totality of depersonalization. "Myrtle said, 'Don't sell the house. Don't sell the baby...'" says Jaffe in "Selling the House," her voice in an abyss of unsophisticated echo, the music around her the laughable rhythm and melody from a cheap Casiotone. Here loneliness is as simple as falling into introspection, and searing cold and heat are the same.

But the end of reasoning consciousness is a grotesque, musicless prophecy entitled "Pieces." Here the vocal mix of "She Wants to Forget" is reversed, with Jaffe upfront and McGee fading into the darkness...

"Don't ever say no to me

Every word I speak is like an island..."

...and "Black and White" winds down a simple, memorable refrain, typical of the laments from the Viscera vacuum: "Simply...not...strong enough." And like a real foreign film, say by Godard or Antonioni, the cassette ends with a mechanical rhythm that slows and falls apart. When man collapses, so do his machines — this is a very cinematic idea.

Actually, with hindsight from the 1984 cassette *Who Is This One?* the psychological effectiveness of *In a Foreign Film* is unsurprising given the sparseness of its instrumentation. One notices immediately in *Who Is This One?* the increase of interest in electronics (mainly a monophonic synthesizer) and tape manipulation. But also, from the title alone one can see that Viscera's nagging assault on the human identity has become more overwhelming: no more hiding behind the celluloid of the foreign film.

Viscera seems to know the true path of terror in the bloodstream. We are now beyond that point where simple ghoulies and supernatural phenomena can set us into paranoid

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Jaffe similarly displays a distinct and precise evolution in her C-35 *The Desire to Castrate Father* —the only predictable element of which is its side titles: "Dominant;" "Submissive." From there on in it's a case of "Nothing is true—everything is permitted," with Jaffe's mind working in typically anarchic fashion (ever read a letter by her? Strange!). Enlisting the drumming assistance of Mark McGee, Jaffe flips off of the board into a shimmering chlorine pool of pseudo-rock. This means rock rhythms and firmly tonal keyboard work, but with **everything** —including her spasm-wrenching voice—treated into the caverns of digi-delay. She seems to drift in and out of a black hole in "Rotating Bodies Explode": "Quickly my dear, then down. Hurry, dear!" Here she manages to work with erotic sensibilities in a more abstract way than does Lydia Lunch, who tends to depict concretely and frequently missing the mark, with less success than Jaffe. In "By Force" and "The Tongue Everywhere," the mix obscures the lyrics, but the vocal quality is the primary source of attack; in her art, the castration of father shall be performed with only half-visible instruments. Three of the titles on Side Submissive read like a personal proclamation: "I Feel Sick;" "Getting Old;" "Enjoy Yourself." Even here one can read the detachment of the spirit, the feeling of displacement which separates a soul from its happiness. The desire to castrate may be merely the last, repressed urge of a frustrated consciousness. Musically, drums and keys predominate, and the noticeable absence of backing tapes is surprising. And just when you think you're tired of drums and keys, Jaffe offers "The Impossible Man" (father?), a beautifully haunting clarinet solo in the raga style for two or three multitracked woodwinds (and finally, on track four, the drums as well). All in all these solo projects are critical in their elaborations upon central themes of Viscera. New projects by Dog as Master and Master/Slave relationship have not been available for discussion here.

Incidentally, Jaffe and McGee are aware that A/a's cassette column, Pause & Eject, is lifted from their Cause & Effect (asks Debbie proudly, "Have you no shame?"). This brings the discussion to a short summary of their distribution service (which is no secret already to many of our readers). With a new catalogue that features what must be the most comprehensive selection of cassette music available in one place, Jaffe and McGee advise interested parties that "Groups/Artists are welcome to submit cassettes for consideration... Our desire is to promote underpromoted music... Please write to us. We love to make new contacts." Other comments sent to A/a by the team seem to have slipped to the underworld, however Ladd/Frith's Objekt magazine of California inform that C&E "has recently started up their own production/promotion of cassettes. They plan to issue a special Vox Populi cassette edition, and to produce music by S/M Operations, Jack Up, Occupant, Roberta Eklund, and more." Many of these editions have already reached release. The Vox Populi cassette is called *La Cathedrale Morte*, to digress.

Contact: Cause & Effect 5015½ North Winthrop Avenue Indianapolis IN 46205. If like many you are already in contact with them, write again now...this is a special occasion...:

Let's see what can be done about a Jaffe/McGee personal tapeography:

VISCERA

- In a Foreign Film (C-60)
- A Whole Universe of Horror Movies (C-60)
- Who Is This One (C-60)
- Bloody But Chic, Belgium (1 track)
- Audio Communication Corp., #6, Belgium (1 track)
- Objekt #2, USA (1 track)
- Testube Cassettezine, USA (1 track)
- Homo Sapiens, Belgium (1 track)
- Sex and Bestiality, France (1 track)
- L'Enfer Est Intime, France (1 track)
- Sensationel #3, France, (1 track)
- Contemporary Classic Blues, France (1 track)
- Pas De Deux, Spain (1 track)
- Band-It #16, Germany (1 track)
- Zamizdat Trade Journal #2, USA (1 track)
- Hear the ROAR of Mountains, USA/a (1 track)

DOG AS MASTER

- Coffee Spleen and the Barking Dog (C-35)
- Black Body (C-40)

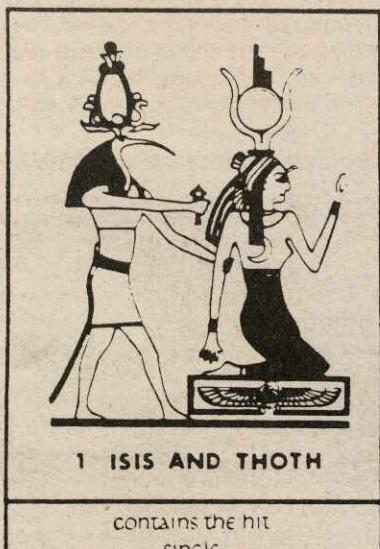
MASTER/SLAVE RELATIONSHIP

- The Desire to Castrate Father (C-35)
- "Fanatic"/"Embracing Power" (C-10)
- 35th Human Attempt, Human Flesh, Insane Music Belgium (three tracks with Jaffe)

—Carl Howard

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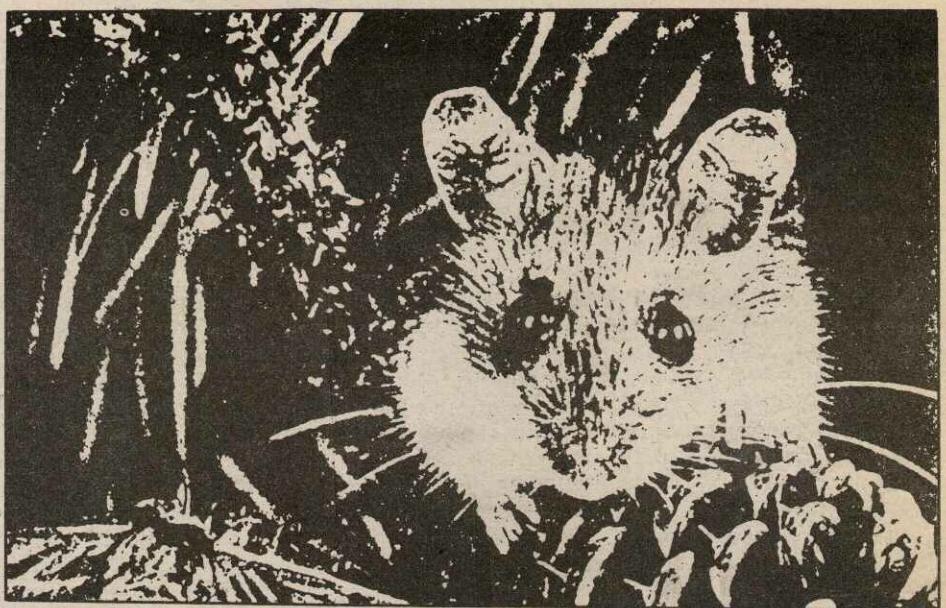
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PL—Paul Lemos
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Goebbles and Harth: *Frankfurt-Peking* (Contact: Riskant Records—Hansaring 80, D-5000, KOLN 1, WEST GERMANY). It's quite a task trying to accurately describe the music of Goebbles and Harth; several adjectives come to mind, but none capture the eccentric, truly avant-garde nature of their sound. This new LP, beautifully pressed and produced, consists of two very different sides, the first of which is made up of four, semi-structured excercises in eccentricity. The sound can be likened to some of Henry Cow's work: political, improvisational, yet rooted in a basic structure. Side One's compositions are usually based upon steady, rhythmic threads carried on by either bass or piano, over which drift various electronic gurglings, found voices, and horns of all sorts. Certainly the music is experimental, yet it has nothing to do with the industrial or difficult schools because of its acoustic, free jazz orientation. Side Two is absolutely fascinating. Here we have the "Peking Opera," a fifteen-minute opus based on multi-tracked Chinese recordings (static and all...) interspersed with Goebbles' and Harth's sparse, strangely dissonant accompaniment. The found recordings seem to relate a story of some kind, textually enhanced by the music. As is the case with any operatic composition, a great range of emotion and color appears here, dynamically shifting in seamless movements. Strongly recommended. —PL

Muslimgauze: *Blinded Horses* (Contact: Bryn Jones 447 Chorley Road Swinton Manchester ENGLAND//Availability: Various including RRRecords). Bryn Jones vinyl releases are a string of thought-provoking and almost theatrical forums for the unbiased understanding of middle eastern culture. This new release, a six-track 33 rpm, dispatches with DMX drums for real eastern percussion as well as a typical assortment of documentary tapes, which can be of Arab demonstrations at embassies or PLO rallies or the songs of their ancient religions. With Muslimgauze perhaps the world's only objective political arena for middle eastern controversy is provided. We can consider the culture behind the newsreels we see every day of effigy-burnings, shootings, and rallies. Track titles like "Byzantine Crucifixion," "Zebra Slaughter," and "Palestine" recall the



sensationalist style of tabloid newspapers and thereby offer us further cause for introspection. Bryn Jones' work is always as appealing and original as it is rich in exotic culture—and he is a welcome change from the standard political viewpoints of Time magazine. —CH

Ohrschrauben: *DOM Compilation* (Availability: Limited). Here is an LP that must be obtained immediately (that is, if any are left unbought! —CH). The best and most extreme compilation LP since the brilliant *Neuengamme*, but sadly only produced in a limited edition of two hundred and fifty copies. Included here is a new, fourteen-minute tour de force by Whitehouse entitled "My Cock's On Fire." The attitude here is as violently sadistic as ever, but the development which began with their last LP (*Great White Death*) continues. The violence of the piece emanates from the grinding, unyielding electronic din that accompanies the angst-ridden narrative. This is not the usual Whitehouse expose on sexual violence; it is implied, allowing the listener's imagination to fill in the graphic details. "My Cock's On Fire" is the centerpiece of the LP, and reminds me of MB's more aggressive works in its dense and immoveable electronic wall. This entire LP is superb, with a roster of artists like Current 93, Nurse With Wound, Vagina Dentata Organ, Gary Mundy's new project Toll, and the amazing HNAS. Not to slight the other artists, suffice to say that the tracks range from total noise and metallic maelstroms and tape-manipulated visions of psychopathic desperation to resounding, layered sound sculptures. Each cut is essential, making this the compilation of the year. (Whether copies are still available at this late date is uncertain) —CH

Boy Dirt Car: *Catalyst* (Contact: Artweather Communications, PO Box 92181 Milwaukee WI 53202). Milwaukee's Boy Dirt Car probes the physical and spiritual manifestation of the catalyst in nature; the median zone between stimulus and reaction which is spontaneous and volatile. With an instrumental approach that reminds of Neef, or of the curiousity towards physical elements of the early Neubauten, they join abstract sound with controlled metal and conventional instruments. The effect is one of a cunning musical attitude charged further by an impressive philosophy of the catalyst: "Wherever impact occurs, catalyst exists," they say; and taking a cue perhaps from William Burroughs or even from local friends F/I, they transform reaction into communication. They even dedicate a piece to the late great communicator Ed Gein, the noted carpenter who was also linked to some murders... Ask Boy Dirt Car about their profile in—dig—*The Wall Street Journal* (October 3 1985), and inquire for a pamphlet which accompanies this 1984 cassette. —CH

Mnemonists: *Mnemonists Orchestra/Some Attributes of a Living System* (from Aeon Distribution—604 Princeton, Fort Collins CO 80525). This beautifully packaged, finely-pressed double LP is the reissue of the Mnemonists' first two LP's, dating back to 1979 and 1980. For those only familiar with their later works (*Horde*, *Biota*, *Gyromancy*), the material here will certainly come as a surprise. Like later discs, both of these recordings are created using mostly acoustic instruments, and much of the material is improvised. The outstanding differences are in textural and dynamic complexity as well as in the density of sound. *Mnemonists Orchestra* consists of live, free improvisation driven by

jazzy trumpets, saxes, and trombones offset by chaotic guitar experimentation, feedback, and plucked string bass. Each of the four pieces is based upon rapid, jangling instrumental interplays similar to those found in the spontaneous works of Henry Cow. The sound is very straightforward, with little studio enhancement. Rarely does the use of electronics invade the mix, as is the case with later efforts. *Attributes*, *Mnemonists'* second release, marks definite progression towards the present sophistication of works like *Gyromancy*. Here the group employs greater use of tape manipulations and electronic processing. Basically this two-side long piece is a montage of prepared guitars and horns, voices, and electronics spliced, fragmented, and molded into a very dark, vigorously unpredictable soundscape. All hints of free jazz jam are buried, for this is a desolate, fractured work which requires time and thought. Although the sound is not as active and dense as later works, it is definitely afied of the majority of what was coming out under the guise of 'experimental music' in 1979. Overall this package serves as an essential historical document of a group that was very much ahead of its time. Included in the beautifully illustrated gatefold sleeve are the original art pieces which accompanied each LP upon initial release. This is a work of rare quality, one which took much time and care to produce. —PL

Pacific 231 & Le Syndicat: *Alliance* (Exclusively from Cause & Effect 5015½ North Winthrop Street Indianapolis IN 46205). In this important teamup one can see the stylistic variations between these two nevertheless ferocious performers. Without ever being didactic, P 231 offers two pieces from October 1983, "Useless Weapon" and "Blut und Boden," in which the basic simplicity underlying the rough exterior is revealed (and expanded upon of course in his 1985 LP release). These two works utilize quaint old Nazi march recordings as well as the typically impenetrable walls of noise and scream. The Le Syndicat soundtrack, called "All 'Armi" and recorded live by Pierre of P 231 in August 1984, displays a textured interweaving of sound—of music and tape—in which the changes are less abrupt but no less startling. This well-recorded collaboration, involving two of Europe's finest "industrial" sound artists, is undeniably engaging, and scintillatingly powerful. —CH

Marc Almond: *Vermin in Ermine* (Some Bizzare label). *Vermin in Ermine* is the first solo album by an English cult figure still not widely appreciated in the US. The former lead singer of Soft Cell enjoyed one massive hit here, "Tainted Love," before fading into a



relative obscurity despite the subsequent releases of seven fine albums, due to an inexplicable—and very sad—lack of airplay. Americans have really lost out, because Almond's an extremely clever songwriter, a strong and original vocal talent, and a dazzlingly charismatic personality. An "incredibly ugly misfit" and pathetic loser by his own admission, he has made a career of exploring his own pain, and that of other down-and-outs. Bag ladies and prostitutes with hearts of gold are particular Almond fascinations. Singing his little elegies to life's also-rans with a gut-wrenching passion, he can sometimes veer laughingly off-key. This is annoying, but worth putting up with; you won't find this level of explosive passion from another singer. "The Edith Piaf of the 1980's" is my favorite comparison.

Vermin in Ermine's centerpiece is something called "Ugly Head," an apparent allusion to the heartless nickname used to taunt Almond as a schoolboy:

'Cause children are so cruel
And they called you 'ugly, ugly head'
When you were at school...
You always are the last resort
For vultures on the make
They say 'you've got to taste the hamburger
To appreciate the steak'

"Ugly Head" is the quintessential Marc Almond loser anthem and an excellent explanation of his cult appeal. It goes straight for the tear ducts. If "Ugly Head" doesn't break your heart, then you haven't got one. "Tenderness is a Weakness" is a likeable foot-stomping flamenco number with another wildly self-pitying lyric. Our hero here is "just a victim of circumstance/just a loser who lost his chance." More heart-tugging material, unless of course you've never felt like a loser, in which case this LP is definitely not for you.

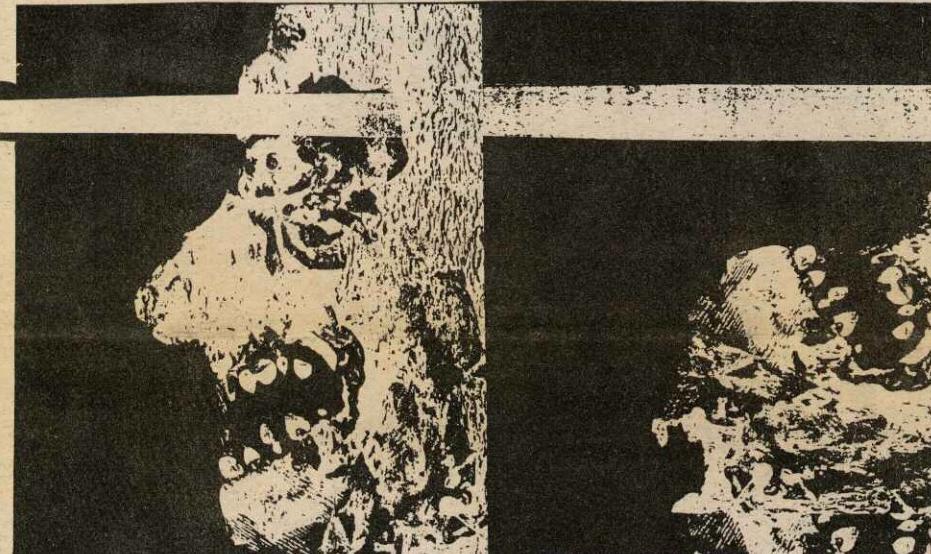
Vermin in Ermine is a schizophrenical album. "Shining Sinners" and "Solo Adultos" are horrific epics about the rapacious cruelty of city life. They deal with gang warfare and child prostitution respectively, and they are rather hard on the nerves. On the other hand, "You Have," "Gutter Hearts," and "The Boy Who Came Back" are as light and airy, and as catchy as anything Almond's ever written. It's difficult to describe these frothy confessions except to say that they have instantly hummable choruses, are swathed in kitchy Phil Spector-sized productions involving delicious multilayers of strings and backing vocals, and practically scream SINGLE. In fact "You Have" and "The Boy Who Came Back" have indeed been released as British 45's, as has "Tenderness is a Weakness." "You Have" may be Almond's most instantly accessible melody since "Tainted Love," but while tapping your foot be aware that the lyrics appear to be about the death of a lover. "The Boy Who Came Back," which has a happier ending, continues from the days of Soft Cell Almond's habit of incorporating into his pop songs bits and pieces from completely unexpected genres. For "Boy," despite its swirling production and danceable beat, is a folk song, replete with a picaresque storyline plus chord

progressions and vocal harmonies which will be recognizable to folk buffs as being those unique to the folk music of the British Isles. Gone are the synthesizers which Almond favored so in the Soft Cell days. *Vermine in Ermine* instead offers strings, brass, electric guitar, bass and drums, piano, banjo, and in fact just about everything but the (something here about a plumbing appliance—CH). The change is hardly noticeable, for the star of this record, as with any of his previous works, is Almond's personality: warm, passionate, and endearing. Almond's music is an acquired taste. Do this. —MT

John Wiggins: *pARTicle mUSic* (C-20 from 3 Woodhull Place Northport NY 11768//Availability: C&E). New York resident eschews traditional methods of electronic sound manipulation for a fascinating and home-grown approach which fractures sonic realism through custom digital software. Wiggins—whose work comes highly recommended by the International Electronic Music Association in Salamanca, NY—says that he literally “steals” sounds from an important cable network and, processing them into multitrack, creates pure, honest sonic collages which hearken to the pioneers of the French *musique concréte*. Always lively, witty, and volatile, *pARTicle mUSic* speaks positively for American electronic music, and for the future of John Wiggins. Attractively packaged in watercolor-speckled labels, the cassette is a progressive follow-up to his first, *Anagenic*. Wiggins compositions are at least as affable as he is personally, and so... it's contact time. —CH

John Hudak: *no basis for reason* (Contact PO Box 42752 Philadelphia PA 19101). On his weekly program at WXPN-FM in Philadelphia, “Sound(s)pace,” John Hudak plays some of the most original and independent music being composed in America today. In June 1985 selections from his playlist include John Wiggins, F/i, Psychological Warfare Branch, Smersh, and Leslie Singer. Says a press release for WXPN, “The purpose of ‘Sound(s)pace’ is to reignite the spirit of the first sound manipulators—to provide a space for the sounds of audio art.” In his own compositions, Hudak works unpretentiously as he interweaves sound sources and reignites that original spirit of Pierre Schaefer: pure manipulation without the showmanship which frequently tries to mask our jaded attitude towards *musique concréte* today. Beneath the neo-primitivist cartoon cover of the cassette *no basis for reason* (a telling phrase about his ‘method’ of composition) lies sixty minutes of sonic improvisation, about which Hudak remarks “These pieces are environmental and concrete in a way, not concerned with extreme dynamic changes but just existing in the moment as a length of time or tape.” Sporting titles like “preparation,” “guided meditation,” and “Frenchman in a washer” (Schaefer?), the cassette’s six pieces utilize “tape manipulated and decayed natural sound” and material from radios and records. The only identifiable sound source, the woman-screaming glass-breaking lock groove from SPK’s *Leischenshrei*, is soon enough overwhelmed (in the piece “guided meditation”) by other sounds to cover for its over-recognizability. Hudak can be reached at the above address as well as at WXPN-FM, 3905 Spruce Street Philadelphia PA 19104. Send him your music for “Sound(s)pace”! —CH

Craig Burk: *Codes of Abstract Conduct* (Contact: Alia Records c/o Jack Fetterman 345



incarnations; however the eight- and four-track recorders used here have proved inadequate in reproducing the powerful atmosphere which they generate. Doctor Nerve's sound is a blissful test of musical severity, and as always the live element is imperative. Again, it is however useful to employ the LP as a guide to Doctor Nerve's style, as on “Nothing You Can Do Hurt Me” and “Mink Shadows,” but not as a replacement for the full thing. For their second outing to become available next year, sixteen-track recorders are being used. Then the heads will turn (except in Queens). —CH

Christian Marclay: *Record Without a Cover* (Contact Recycled Records 304 East 5 Street Suite 5B New York NY 10003). As the curtain of time was drawing upon New York's 8BC nightclub, Christian Marclay and others staged a performance celebrating the release of this one-sided EP with a smattering of human gurgles, piano mangles, and brilliantly sequenced records. The show was a testament to the present sophistication of Marclay's craft. *Record Without a Cover* is a truly long-awaited release, being one long piece recorded in four tracks at Plugg, NY in March 1985. Beginning deceptively with a long intro of record crackles, it becomes clear that this piece has been deliberately concealed for the home listener, who through his naivete will undoubtedly imagine that there is something wrong with his copy! This is but one of several “tricks” which Marclay employs. With a gradually-layering crescendo of sound inputs and a score (ahem) of anti-climaxes, Marclay reveals through his composition a sympathetic ancestry with the Futurists of the 1920's. Like the work of Kurt Schwitters (papa Merz), the piece's construction is elaborate without ever becoming unnecessarily dense. A false ending is also employed to keep even the patient listener at attention.

The nature of Marclay's own recordings is such that the protection of his own records becomes a contradiction. The composer gets his own materials from street corners, from dustbins, and from junk dealers. The dilapidated conditions of these records, liberated as they have been from the Hades of the unwanted, becomes a vital factor of Marclay's own compositions. As previously discussed in A/a's interview with the artist, the deterioration, the factor of change, is central to the experience. Each record skip not only transforms the sound of the piece but effects its evolution (or de-evolution). A skip or pop can itself become a rhythm because of the record's regular shape. Much has been made of “destroyed music” by Gerald X. Jupiter-Larsen, the Canadian whose work as The Haters includes the “scratch-it-yourself” seven-inch. In this instance the work itself does not exist until the listener effects a destructive change upon the otherwise smooth surface. Record collectors are certain to be infuriated by Marclay's dictum: “Do Not Store This Record In a Protective Bag.” However in doing this the composer is deliberately de-emphasizing the ‘finished product’ part of the record and opening the way for further change, further evolution, as copies of *Record Without a Cover* do themselves become worn out and even discarded. This is not Marclay refusing responsibility for his work, but encouraging its own liberation through his unpretentiousness. And this should lay to rest the claim sometimes heard around that Marclay is just another artist-poseur from pompous New York City. The city may be pretentious, but its people can only be the victims. —CH



Cover Detail/Bene Gesserit A HIGH, HaPPy, PeRVeRSe and CyNiCaL CRy of Joy

East 80 Street—#33E New York NY 10021). When a pearl of wisdom is left as a pearl should be, its effect can be hard—or soft—hitting, but more importantly sardonic. Appropriate to the context, Craig Burk and his fellow musicians undertake a “thirteen-part song cycle,” modern-day lieder confronting equally modern subject matter. Pursuing what Burk terms the “twenty-first century art song,” he devises what Jon Pareles—in the New York Times (4-30-84)—describes as “a poetry reading with sound effects and the compressed quasi-rock songs of...DNA—fascinating, obsessive miniaturism.” How prudent of Pareles to avoid the death-pit term “minimalism!” Burk's approach is to maximize effectiveness in a minimal chronological frame (some songs must not exceed one minute), but this is the only relation. Theatrical in style and execution, Burk's numbers rollick (is that a word?) through modern woes and vices with occasional acidity (“One can't try,” he says in “Just Go On.” “At least, not you/You're the ready wiseguy/With lots of little quips/In rapid fire”) but more typically as the inner voice of conscience and positive assertion (“It's time to stand/At attention/For surprise inspection/Then, the hiking songs/Along the diamond-hard shortcut” he stresses in “No More 5-Kleenex Movies”). While such an approach can occasionally foster a stultifying (stigma-fying?) morality, the technical skill and buoyancy of the performances more ordinarily keep this in check. Overall, a kind of ‘David Thomas and The Pedestrians for the serious-minded?’ Probably not; but ask about Burk's releases anyway, including a scheduled twenty-one part song cycle release entitled *The History of Decency*. —CH

Doctor Nerve: *Out to Bomb Fresh Kings* (Contact Puno's Music RR2 Box 383 Sherman CT 06784). It is an incorrect assumption that what keeps a form of music/language/communication alive is popularity. Over the past fifteen years we have all been witness to the fact that genres of music can wither and die right in the laps of their adoring fans. However the single most important addition to the language of music in the twentieth century has been jazz. Seventy to eighty years have not been able to extinguish its flame, or even to dim its lights. Jazz alters subtly, growing with each new (and passing) style. And while blues rock and fusion have threatened its survival, jazz continues, unfazed by those who would strip it of its vitality. Jazz thrives in two-bit nightclubs, on streetcorners (perhaps the true test of endurance); it is urban America's ultimate expression. So it is that the aptly-named Doctor Nerve comes barreling out of every neatly-locked room to wail unequalled in half-destroyed venues like lower Manhattan's dear departed 8BC (you couldn't buy such memories!). Their hard, manic wit pummels down the walls—jazz laser-rayed into the soul. The quirky guitar passages of leader Nick Didkovsky bend and twist (like the scratch idiom of Arto Lindsay meeting that of Bill Laswell head-on—with collision being the order of the day) as the languages of rock, fusion, even—gag—“industrial” are liberated into the new context of free, effervescent JAZZ. The LP available, *Out to Bomb Fresh Kings*, is a useful document, but it is by no means definitive. It certainly captures the band's raw energy—its nerve—over three

Human Flesh: The 35th Human Attempt and Bene Gesserit: a HIGH, HaPPy, PeRVeRSe and CyNiCaL CRy of Joy... (Contact Insane Music 2, Grand Rue B-6190 Trazegnies BELGIUM//Availability: various). Two new LP's from the Insane “family” of groups may indicate that the ever-busy duo of Neffe and Bal are moving to increase public awareness. They certainly deserve it; in their work for over ten years they've come to embody everything the “alternative” music field stands for today. Enough o' that. The new Bene Gesserit LP once again presents the artists in the roles of Benedict G. (Bal) and B. Ghola (Neffe), who pull out the Casiotones and the peculiar-sounding symbols which are BG trademarks. While Casiotones are known offenders of unsophisticated sound quality (even the new CZ-1000 is far from the most versatile synthesizer available in its price range), Neffe makes good his claim that with sound treatments there is no monotony. More radical however are treatments of Nadine Bal's voice. Bal, who already comes off like a poppy version of Diamanda Galas, intones like an alien temptress with an amazing ability to stress every multi-syllabic English word on the wrong syllable (recalling “Wash Your Ideas” from Third Mind Records’ “Rising From the Red Sand” compilation). Bal has a vocal solo piece on this album, “DeSiRS-DelReS,” which at one minute-twenty ends as quickly as it begins, followed by “KiTCHeN MuSiC (FoR KiTCHeN PeoPLe)” —the title being a take on one of their numerous cassette compilation series. Insane guitarist Daniel Malempre (M.A.L.) guests on two of the titles, “eNFaNTs DeS RueS” and “TouRDoRiZoNMuZiKaL (C'eST Ca).” It is of interest to note that no track on this album exceeds four minutes in length, which along with the high recording and pressing quality may betray a bid on their part for radio play.

The Human Flesh LP is of a far different variety, being much less commercially accessible. The concept of HUMAN Flesh more closely resembles improvisational tape layering than the involved structuring of Bene Gesserit (which is more akin to X-Ray Pop/Bocal 5). As indeterminate generation plays a greater role in Human Flesh, the scope of the work is necessarily greater. This LP is a meeting place for slower musics as well as for Japanese, English, French, Armenian, and German texts, and for artists from such distinguished bands as Viscera and Merzbow. Neffe provides a sparse and dramatic setting for the ramblings of Master/Slave Relationship's Deborah Jaffe. Jaffe does not get to duet with Nadine Bal, which would be a kick in any universe, however the LP does project a world of dark, isolated, and harsh physical images—as shown by the track titles “Five Minutes Before Death,” “My Fears Are My Only Friends,” “Every Ill Man,” and “Alone.” With background music which scans the styles of the middle and far east, the effect is also peculiarly European in its quirky spaciousness—this goes for the Bene Gesserit LP as well. Write to the man Neffe, send him sounds, stamps, and paper money from your native country. You'll have his friendship for life. —CH

REPORT FROM XEROX SUTRA EDITIONS



QWA DIGS UNDER PARIS'S

Approximately Eleven Apothems

1. Having spent five years thinking about and composing *papier musique* (Schoenberg's words for music meant to exist mostly on paper, usually not capable of being realized in performance) but never playing any instruments, it was a revelation/turning point in 1981 to meet Liz Was (who's played all manner of music since infancy) and to begin assaulting, banging, blowing, and emoting a musical and extra-musical association.
2. The whole first year we played music together it was an unspoken rule that no representational sound or rhythm could take place. Pain or exaltation, nostalgia or worry replaced melody and development. Simultaneous energies, a sort of *brut* John Cage, created a music that stylistically encompassed world music all at once. Recordings of this fall into the 'difficult music' category. Ritual non-virtuoso music for insects. Recordings of this music are interesting mostly as documents. We arrived at the name *Two Dogs in Paris* for our activities. Some early innovations included playing a case of empty beer bottles filled with varying amounts of water with the blower hose of a vacuum cleaner. Also a coiled garden hose with a saxophone mouthpiece, called appropriately a french hose.
3. In looking back now a lot of the music that we were doing then had an aggression and a fear that I find in listening to the parochial genre of industrial music. Except at that time in the west there was very little mention of this music; Throbbing Gristle was unheard of, etcetera. Closer realized parallels were Varese, Partch, free jazz, noise improv, and tape and electronic music.
4. The majority of our fifty-plus performances have been produced and arranged by ourselves in alternative spaces. We rarely do the same performance twice, although at this point (1985) we have songs that even with improvisation remain identifiable. Performances often incorporate modifications of the environment, super-8 films, slides and filmstrips, costumes, tapes, dance, audience interaction (both passive and active), and music, yes, music.
5. A major approach to creating musical and performance pieces is text-generation. The *Reptilian Swamp Trauma*, for example, was an industrial scenario from a chapter of the Miekal And novel *BYSTANDER*: A dark, dripping stage with silent, creeping turtle and a lizard, who play zither and moan into a distorted microphone; man in corner heating metal objects with torch and later banging metal and then intensive drums; a film of animated organic and plastic covered objects and a scaly woman masturbating with black amoebic blob in red light; Miekal as a bystander on stage reading his narrative about Balboa Pettybone, a survivor roaming post-nuclear cities of everyday suffering and destruction in search of a meaning and a bald woman from his past named 5BB339005368, and manipulating prerecorded tape of voices screaming, moaning, panting, crying, glissandoing.
6. Every year or so we permute a few letters of our name to indicate new directions, new ideas, members, sounds. From *Two Dogs in Paris* we became *Twa Dogs in Paris*, VIA *Twa Dogs under Paris*, hence *Qwa Digs under Paris's*.
7. The quality of intermedia in music is one of its most ancient and often overlooked phenomena. Music like language is a form to adhere disjunct elements into a central micro/macro focus. For example, combining sound poetry with scraping guitar strings, with tape sounds of buildings crumbling while someone swings a bullroarer over their head. Music is also a most accessible realm to activate the imaginary alongside the hyper-real. The more we listen will change what we listen to. The physical necessity of music as opposed to the auditory placebo-ness.
8. We work primarily in the genres of progressive rock-song format, *musique concrete* and noise improv, chamber industrial, and new jazz. Usually a piece will not be exclusively one style but will draw vocabulary from many different sources. Synthesia. A pan-earthling post-industrial decollage.
9. The lyrics for an industrial folk song (by Miekal And):

If I were a worker
and could push myself away
The longest days get lost
planning what I can't do.
A beam of light commands
I will, I will pretend
but dropping instinct would
shake loose not a worker.
But blame not heart wears thin
live wire and myself awry.
Visible from the lost

what I will not unlearn. 10. I began as a writer publishing in small press magazines. Now that the practice of decentralized independent production has transferred into the world of cassettes and records, finality and finished products have become less important than the distinction of documenting and networking VIA mail, contacts, non-corporate distributors, and the new press. The world of writing and music seem radically identical in their needs and creativity, yet they overlap very little and seem to keep a distance from each other. In the end this separation will be a real barrier to establishing a new global culture (to replace the classically outmoded one past-present).

11. Our other activities include curating the Avant Garde Museum of Temporary Art, which is hosting an international mail art show through January 1986. The theme is *Ritual and Icon*. The "museum" is an ever-changing wooden structure that has been a public installation in our front yard for three years. We operate Xerox Sutra Editions which is an experimental small press specializing in verbal/visual literature and cut-up language. We also publish *Spek* and *Anti-Isolation*, two different magazines devoted to new arts. There is also *Audio Muzixa Qet*, a cassette label featuring the music of Qwa Digs under Paris's, as well as Drake Scott and Dan Goldstein. In the future we will be releasing a tape by language poets Charles Berenstein and Jyn Hejinian. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a free catalogue of available books and tapes. Note also that a recent issue of *UNSOULD* (Volume 2 No. 2) has a longish feature on our various activities.

PARTIAL BIBLIO/TAPE-OGRAPHY

books by Miekal And

- 1980 *The Mechanical Omelette*
- 1981 *Chameleon, Bounce, Facility, Contact, Sample*
- 1981 *Klee*
- 1983 *Trilobite*
- 1983 *Zerzerex*
- 1983 *Voyage 1984 Greta Garbo Box*
- 1983 *Knowledge Swirling Man Tells Slow Stories*
- 1984 *Howling from the Woodland Leave Whole*

books by Liz Was

- 1981 *Eyeshadow*
- 1981 *Watch Sally Blow*
- 1983 *Phrex Brain*
- 1984 *Ice or Eve Romis*
- 1985 *Ancient Libraries from Kindergarten*
- 1985 *Onanism Curdles*

tapes by Qwa Digs under Paris's

- 1982 *Audiobiographies 2*
- 1983 *Post Punk Martian Big Band*
- 1984 *I Shin Ohn*
- 1985 *Atlanding Gwace (selected music 1981-84)*
- 1985 *Audiobiographies 1*
- 1985 *Staples*

films by Qwa Digs under Paris's

- 1983 *The Black Black Bar Eventure*
- 1983 *Infinite Man is Not Destroyed*

—Miekal And for Xerox Sutra Editions
1341 Williamson Street Madison WI 53703

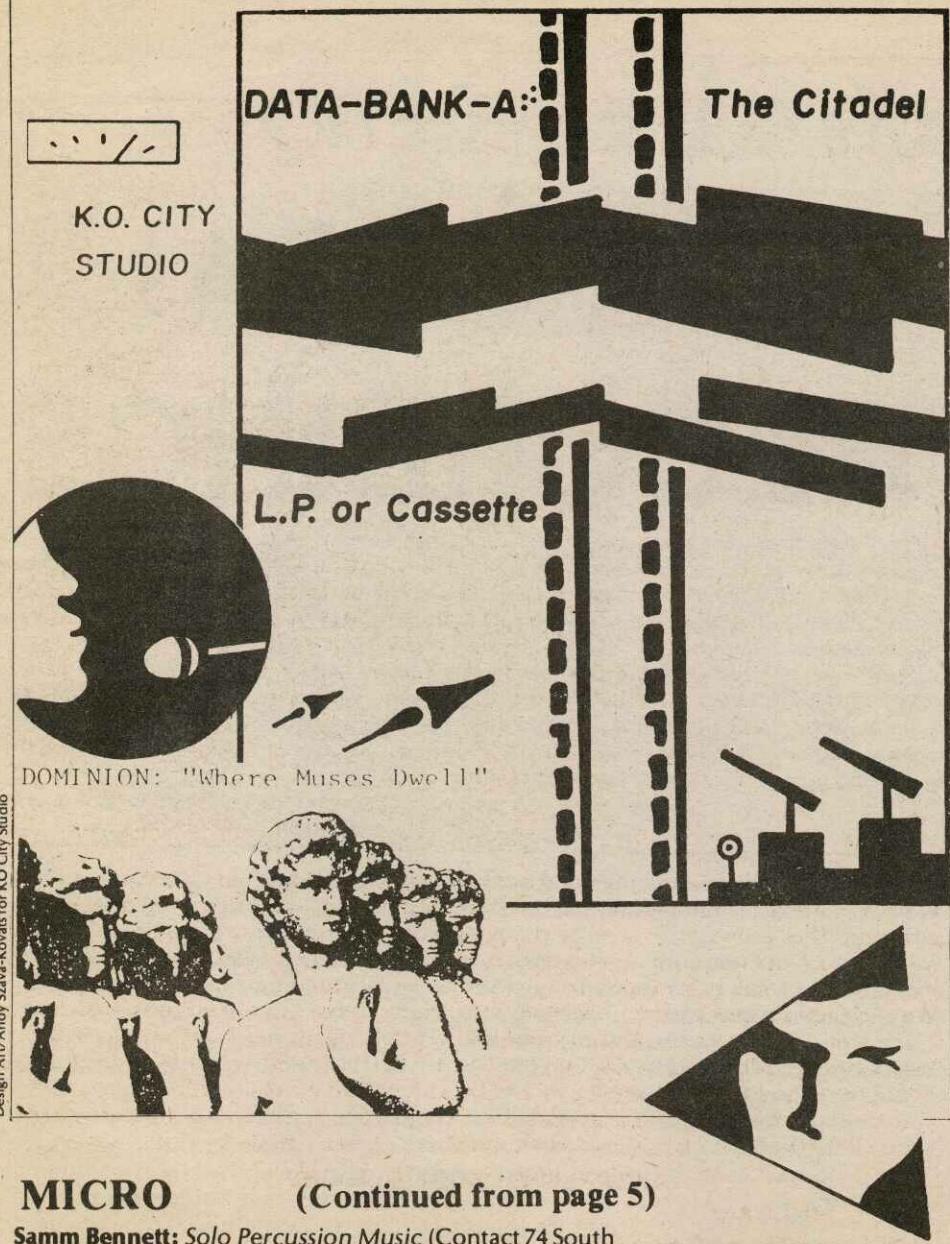
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K.O. CITY
STUDIO



MICRO

(Continued from page 5)

Samm Bennett: Solo Percussion Music (Contact 74 South Portland Avenue Brooklyn NY 11217//or ask A/a regarding new address). We know that in the twentieth century, Americans have finally caught wind of the explosive, percussive force which the non-western world has cultivated for aeons. Too often however the application of free percussion has been limited to narrow patterns, or relegated to eight-bar solos. A handful of artists have focussed on various percussive idioms with an eye towards their evolution, but rarely with the dedication of Samm Bennett, whose works have captivated growing audiences for years with their wit and drive, and with the propulsive muscularity of the performer. To study Bennett in action is to observe his control over his unusual drum kit, consisting of tuned bongoes, cymbals, cowbells, leg bells, and two cranky Snares (electronic drums of "the non-programmable sort," he explains. "They produce sound only when struck with a drum stick or sympathetically activated when a drum or bell to which they are attached is struck"), and to follow his mutations of tempo and sonic density. The twelve cuts on this cassette were recorded between 1981 and 1984 in Alabama, Belgium, and Boston in studio and live surroundings, so naturally the quality varies though it is superior throughout. A 1981 track, "Hiroshima," utilizes either a recording or alive performance of oriental violin, with Bennett introducing the screams of the afflicted at various points like percussive fill-ins. Several pieces on this cassette, including "Option Z" and "Bedjo," have been fleshed into fuller conceptions in Bennett's new band (watch for their LP) Bosh Trio, with himself, Yuval Gabay (rototoms, cymbals, cowbells), and Kumiko Kimoto, whose presentations of oriental voice, dance, and percussion bring an already exciting act to full, vibrant life. Contact Samm Bennett, discover his work, and study it closely. Yes do this.

—CH

Data-Bank-A: The Citadel (Contact: KO City Studio 262 Mammoth Road Lowell MA 01854). By 1983, Andy Szava-Kovats had made his Data-Bank-A: a force to be reckoned with in American cassette music through several releases, including a much-reviewed seven-inch entitled "Intervention," and numerous compilation contributions. But the release of a full-fledged LP x booklet, *The Citadel*, marked an explosion of higher conception from the rather modest scope and production of the early cassette *Spiritus Sanctus*. Data-Bank-A: had carved a more forceful image, due as much to the arrival of guitarist Christopher Elston as to Szava-Kovats entry into the 'song w/lyrics' form. Vocals immediately dominate every mix, as delay-treated as EVERYTHING is, and sequencer patterns evolve into entire melodies and choruses. This swift evolution makes certain songs resemble works by Gary Numan and others by Front 242 (the Geography period); but with better recording, visualization of tracks, and actualization of the work, we now have a sense of Data-Bank-A: as vivid as Szava-Kovats' neo-futurist artwork (virtually every major indie-music publication in America has by now featured his distinctive, missile-becketed advertisements). Strong, programmed rhythms and sturdy poly-synth melodies carry such tracks as the instantly-memorable "A Thousand Mondays": "Your ears have been boxed by the volume of this day/Your stomach in knots—the rope you ate this day/You run for the door but it's locked up on this day." Entry into the pop form does actually constrict some of these compositions somewhat, and a thin line is drawn in lyrics between honest depictions and moral scoldings, but these are traits which many would consider a plus. The mature crafting of the song "The Milky Way" is an enviable lyric combination of science-fiction pathos and paranoia ("In the Milky Way you've got a life that's lost and found... In the Milky Way run until you drop and then you run again"). Another song, "Slave of Love," displays the harsh musical and lyrical physicality of a piece like Attrition's "Monkey In a Bin" (1983): "...Bedrooms, closets, and window sills/Pot-n-grass-n-little pills." Elston's guitars trip lightly over these tracks, propelling them with unmistakeable forward thrust. Returning at present to the cassette format, Data-Bank-A: appears to be progressing on all burners, with a new tape between themselves and The Arms of Someone New (watch this space for a look at their new Office Records EP, *Susan Sleepwalking*). For information on specific matters, you ask A-S-K, a willing communicant.

—CH

PS— Additional information has become available about new products from KO City Studio. In addition to the cassette with TASN, called *Two Sides to Every Story*, the new Data-Bank-A: LP will be called *Access Denied*. Szava-Kovats' new unit, Dominion, has already issued the cassette *Where Muses Dwell*, which in both style and approach represents something entirely new. Now you can ask A-S-K.

The Lounge Lizards: Live '79-'81 (From ROIR Records, 611 Broadway Suite 725 New York NY 10012//Availability: general). There was a special feeling in Big Town then, a sense of something real, almost a true "movement." The legacy of The Lounge Lizards, of DNA, of Konk, was one of interconnected destinies and a reawakening of the primal "jazz" spirit which had so many years earlier been wiped out by smooth, perfect, lifeless fusion. The Lounge Lizards, in the years surrounding 1980 (so long ago now) were the proving ground for a new kind of musical iconoclasm...if only it had lasted! However the spirit represented by the John Lurie of *The Lounge Lizards* (Editions EG 1980) and by Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* (1983) was, painfully, not in evidence in the band's 1983 release *Live From the Drunken Boat* (Europa Records). But since the number of those who enjoy the band probably exceeds the number which has actually seen them perform, Lurie and ROIR have undertaken the excellent task of releasing an album-length's worth of archival material, in which that spirit lives again in all of its vibrancy. Here, rerecorded by Lurie in February 1985 are the pounding rhythms of Anton Fier, the galloping bass lines of Steve Piccolo, the shocking keyboards of Evan Lurie, and the scratch-guitar work of, alternately, Danny Rosen, Dana Vlcek, and Arto Lindsay (in whose work with The Ambitious Lovers the spirit of the New York City decay-aesthetic survives). Of special interest here are a recording of "Ballad," taped at The Lizards' first-ever performance in June 1979 (with Lindsay), and the impressive and impressionistic liner notes of filmmaker Jarmusch: "The Lounge Lizards live have always been a cinematic experience for me—a private cinema where the spectator (or listener) supplies his own images...rain soaked city-streets...Avenue C at 4 am...the latent violence revealed by the gesture of a stranger or the pattern of smoke rising from an abandoned cigarette... This is movie music from the future... a thousand scenarios squeezed inside one tiny cassette." Oh, it was so long ago. Avenue C is paved now, the cobblestones devoured by smooth, perfect, lifeless tar. Loisaida 1985 is a less combustible scenario.

—CH

Biohazard: *Biohazardous Materials* (Contact: Grousho Production Distribution 8074 Berri Montreal CANADA H2R-2H3). In the first cassette from this band, dated 1984, the invocation of nuclear holocaust creates expectations, at least on this end, of generic, "industrial-soundtrack" music. Nothing could be further from the truth—this is the work of proficient musicians who weave around and bend the format of rock in order to create a sound which has more to do with science fiction than anything else. Subtle backgrounds of guitar fill the spaces left vacant by the sparse programmed rhythms, Richard H. Kirk-esque (eh?) keyboards, and delay-treated vocals. Recording quality varies, but it is as good as can be in the case of an instrumental track such as Side A's "Meanwhile (Back In the Jungle)," in which rhythm and a somber bass riff dominate the mix, above several layers of barely-existing keyboard riffs (or is that really a flute and violin?). In this track they somehow manage to give more bass-end resonance to Dr. Rhythm drums than just about anyone—and again there's that distinctive bottom line of treated guitar washing through the track like the currents of a sea. Jazz saxophone also emerges at times in this cassette, but more often the interplay is between the instruments mentioned above. As the tape progresses there is some interesting use of eastern tonality ("Bumburniak") and some wind-rushing-through-the-trees synthesizer, but never anything which can pin Biohazard down as belonging to any one "category." It's better that way.

—CH

Daniel Lentz: *Point Conceptions* (From: Cold Blue Records 1831 Orchid Los Angeles CA 90068//Availability: various). Lentz is a composer whose star is rising; this can be said without fear of contradiction. Over the past eighteen months more recordings by Lentz on more labels have been released than can be listed here. What appears to tie all of his work in various musical musical mediums together is an interest in compositional systems—while his work with synthesized keyboards (such as *On the Leopard Alter*/Icon Records 1984) has been mistakenly compared to that of the so-called "minimalists," he has applied his work with keyboards and filled wine glasses to what he calls the "cascading echo system," in which multiple delay units are employed—eight, in the case of *Point Conceptions*—as substitute for the nine pianos used in live performance of the piece. Thirty-eight minutes in duration, the recording begins in a stately manner; chords and small, repetitive figures skip through the echo systems in, precisely, cascades. Strangely, some chordal figures are not repeated, perhaps because the echo systems are manipulated by the performer (here Arlene Dunlap, with the recording produced by Lentz). While the piece largely describes and executes subtle shifts and harmonic contrasts, Part Two features a sudden change from legato to non-echoed and march-time staccato—only to resume legato playing just as suddenly. Dunlap's performance is well-paced and the recording quality and pressing are impeccable. *Point Conceptions* is a strong example of why Lentz' audience is rapidly growing.

—CH

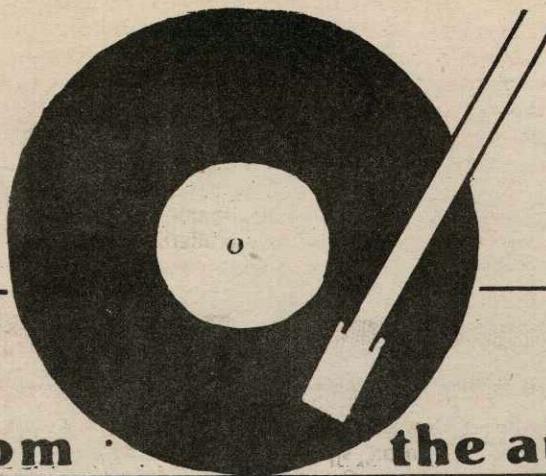
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SWINGING AXE PRODUCTIONS



from the audiofile

PERFORMERS: BENJAMIN VERDERY



Benjamin Verdery / photo Donna Ranieri

The guitar, particularly in America, has attained a level of diversification unknown to other acoustic instruments. Portable, affordable, and deceptively simple to play, the guitar is equally at home playing lush jazz harmonies, heavy metal bomb blasts, or classical nuances. Understandably, the instrument's characteristics must meet the player's needs (a nylon string acoustic is of little use to a megawatt monster), but a common mistake is to assume an alliance with style or genre.

Classical guitar, even with its growing popularity in concert halls and conservatories, combats the same problems which are faced by other artistic pursuits. An increasing distance between strictness of tradition versus the accessibility and rewards of mainstream playing has lead to the popular impression that classical artists and their music are folly for intellectuals and for a small, graphable subset determined to preserve history. Breathing life and vital energy into the classical guitar repertoire is of primary concern to virtuoso Benjamin Verdery, age 29.

Taking up guitar at age nine after watching The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Verdery played electric guitar in what he calls "countless rock bands," until an event changed his musical perspective. "I took up classical guitar at eighteen, after hearing (harpsichordist/composer) Anthony Newman," says Verdery. "I was so turned on by the way he played classical music—which up to then I hadn't really been exposed to."

It was then that Verdery decided to alter his direction completely, enrolling at the State University of New York at Purchase. "I could barely read (music)," he says. "I learned from pieces, and passed the audition by the skin of my teeth." Amazed by the potential of the classical guitar and by the freedom from the confines of a plectrum, Verdery immersed himself in the language of five centuries of repertoire.

Upon graduation, Verdery decided against pursuing a Masters degree, opting instead for the enthusiasm of performance. Moving to New York City, Verdery began to build his career from the ground floor, taking any and all opportunities as they arose. "I started by commuting back to my home town, teaching, giving concerts in churches and libraries, and calling all sorts of restaurants in the Connecticut area," he recalls. After his debut in New York City in 1980, Verdery carved an impressive touring career out of diligence, patience, and the willingness to go nearly anywhere to perform.

"I'm part of Affiliate Artists, a program that sends out artists to a small community for two weeks," says Verdery. "There you play for everybody: churches, high schools, you name it. I recently played for a gathering of one hundred fifty people at someone's ranch in Alabama. These people had never heard classical music—they brought food, sat in

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their neighbors' backyard, and had a great time."

Verdery says he particularly loves playing for a diverse field of audiences. "I recently read about The Police's experiences in India—not that people in Alabama are similar—but there is an analogy in bringing music to people who previously had never been exposed to that genre."

Verdery's love for pop music hasn't diminished as his classical career has grown; keeping in touch with rock is as much a passion as it is vital to his philosophy and approach to playing. "I love pop music," he emphasizes. "I grew up listening to it. I still have all my albums from when I was ten (laughing). Blues to fusion... I can't divorce myself from it. In an odd way I still get my inspiration from it."

In a broader sense, Verdery views pop music as being necessary for maintaining a firm grip on the present. "Musicians of past years, it seems to me, were much more involved with music of their day," he asserts. "A Baroque musician played pieces by composers that were very much a part of his own culture. As classical musicians, I think we lose touch with that aspect, and live in the past a little bit. That's the beauty of pop music—it's of today."

One of the ways in which Verdery works fresh ideas into a performance is by improvising around a standard work as an encore—a practice common to earlier performers (particularly during the Baroque era), but almost lost today. "Quite frankly, it's fun," he says. "During a (Leo) Brouwer etude I'll throw in a blues lick, or whatever I feel is appropriate. The audience gets a feeling for what I like; I think the audience could read it if I wasn't enjoying myself."

Verdery's enthusiasm for performance and his ability to draw an audience into the musical experience is refreshingly straightforward. It would be a mistake to completely attribute this ability to his continued interest in pop music, however energetic the performance. It is because of this exuberance for the music that Verdery felt compelled himself to become a classical artist, and this can change the attitude of an unexposed or prejudiced listener.



"I was lucky—that performance by Anthony Newman showed me just how alive and exciting the music can be," Verdery exclaims. "Of course, people should make the effort to go out and hear a classical concert, but a negative reaction may be the fault of the performer—maybe he didn't do the job for the listener."

As with nearly all classical performers, Verdery spends a good deal of his time teaching. In keeping with his passionate approach to playing, the guitarist attempts to balance the students' time between the necessary, systematic, and technical problems, and expressing one's own musical personality. "I have a definite format; things I have to keep track of such as scales, tone production, development of arpeggios, and basic left and right hand techniques," he explains. "However people have different skills; they progress differently, have varied tastes, and are influenced by different things. Also it is important to remember that musicians blossom at different rates, so I have to weigh all these factors. My goal is to help people express themselves on the instrument and enjoy the music that they play."

"I've become harder (as a teacher)," says Verdery. "I expect results, and see people realize their potential. The great thing about playing an instrument is that it teaches you a lot about yourself. You have to confront the same problems every day—it really shows you how you tick."

One of Verdery's departures from standard guitar pedagogy is his emphasis upon melody. "The guitar is a melodic instrument," he says. "I don't think there's enough time spent on playing simple lines. A guitarist should spend a certain amount of time every day practicing phrasing, just like a violinist."

"So much emphasis today is put on playing technically perfectly," Verdery declares. "You know, competitions and the obsession to play perfectly perhaps turns kids off to classical music. I think teachers are partly to blame, if they preach solely technique and treat every student the same. On the whole, I don't think classical guitar is taught very well at all."

RECORDINGS:

*"Variations and Grand Contrapunctus," from *Music by Anthony Newman*

(Cambridge CRS B-2833)

**Bach: Transcriptions for Guitar*

(Sine Qua Non 79040)

—Richard Stein